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Exploration of Female Auto-racing Athletes' Satisfaction with Current Suits

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Professional auto racing, as one of the leading motorsports around the world, is the number one spectator sport in the United States boasting 75 million fans, and these fans help bolster the local economies of the cities that host them (Odland, 2012). Research has shown that auto racing has been a male-dominated sport (Pflugfelder, 2009; Ross, Ridinger & Cuneen, 2009), it experienced substantial financial growth in recent years (Odland, 2012), are now realizing their increase in popularity and in revenue are directly linked to women participating in the racing. However, the unisex racing suit is made with the male anatomy in mind, which lead to female racing drivers the lack of professional suits made for them, which may impact their performance. Some female racers have to ask professionals to alter the purchased suits or to customize suits for them. Female drivers need “ready-to-wear” racing suits, which are made to fit the female form. The goal of this research is to determine if female drivers are satisfied with the current racing suits.

Function Expression Aesthetic (FEA) Consumer Needs Model (Lamb & Kallal, 1992) was used to understand the female auto racing athletes' clothing needs. Their satisfaction of the available suits was analyzed in three areas; functional, expressive and aesthetic. Functional component includes fit, mobility, comfort, thermal protection and donning/doffing. Expressive component includes elements of values, roles, status and self-esteem. Aesthetic component include the elements such as art element, design principles and body/garment relationship. It is assumed that there will be some challenges in fit, mobility, co mfort and donning/doffing aspects when female racers wear unisex racing suits due to the different body build, unless the suits were altered or customized. In addition, wear unisex suits can not represent female as an individual group since the aesthetic components of suits for male and female should not be same. Therefore, the developed hypothesis are: H1: There will be difference between the satisfaction level of female racers who wearing unisex suits and who wearing suits with alteration and customized made. H2: The satisfaction with functional, expressive, and aesthetic aspects of the racer suits influence the overall satisfaction of the suits.

A non-experimental cross sectional survey was built based on the Function Expression Aesthetic (FEA) consumer needs model. The survey questions were created by carefully observing similar studies and building on the credibility of published research. The survey consisted of three parts. The first part addressed the participants' experiences with their suits. The second part focused on participates' satisfaction with current suits in functional, expressive and aesthetic aspect. The third part measured the overall satisfaction with the current suits. Professional female auto racing

athletes were invited to participate in an online survey through social media websites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. After the consents, they were directed to have an access to a link in Google survey form. The collected data was analyzed by SPSS.

A total of 82 motor racers volunteered to work on the surveys but two of them were answered by males and thus were deleted. Out of the 80 surveys, 74 were completed and used for the data analysis. The age of the sample was ranged from 15 to 55 and they were located globally including US, Canada, England, New Zealand, Malaysia, etc. The number of competitions they have annually varies from 1-2 to 20-30. More than half of the participants answered they purchased their racing suits from the off-the-racks without alterations (n=43, 58.1%). The rest answered either they altered their suits after the purchase (n=6, 8.1%) or ordered custom-made suits (n=25, 33.8%). **H1**: the mean values of the variables were calculated for Function, Expression, and Aesthetic and Satisfaction for the two groups: one who did not use alterations and the one who used alteration or custom order and found significant difference by the groups. In the comparison of the mean values, the group who did not use altered or custom made suits indicated lower satisfaction for the function (m 1=3.48 vs. m 2=4.05; df=1, F=10.88**), expression (m 1=2.51 vs. m 2=3.53; df=1, F=16.14***), and aesthetic of their suits (m 1=2.43 vs. m 2=3.43; df=1, F=15.41***), and for the overall satisfaction (m 1=3.37 vs. m 2=4.03; df=1, F=9.60**). **H 2**: the relationships between the variables were tested by regression analysis. Before the test, reliability of the variables was examined by calculating *Cronbach's* alphas and the resulted values were ranged from .87 to .94. The regression model (adj. $R^2 = .62$, df=3, F=38.62***) identified the significant impact of Function ($b=.44$, $t=4.43$ **) but not of Expression and Aesthetic. A further investigation evident the positive effect of comfort and fit satisfaction (which were identified as sub categories in functional aspect) on the overall satisfaction.

In general, female auto-racing drivers who had use alteration or custom made suits have a better satisfaction with their suits than who have not used any alteration. Their satisfaction with current suits in Functional aspects, especially in comfort and fit, significantly impacted their overall satisfaction, not like Expression and Aesthetic satisfaction. The knowledge gained from the study will have important implications for the industry and professional agencies.

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